UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/51/361
16 September 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fiftieth session
Item 93 of the provisional agenda*

QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR

Progress report of the Secretary-General

1. Since I reported to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session in 1995 (A/50/436), I have convened two rounds of talks between the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal in the framework of my continuing good offices on the question of East Timor. I held the seventh round of discussions since 1992 with Foreign Ministers Ali Alatas of Indonesia and Jaime Gama of Portugal in London on 16 January 1996 (see press release SG/SM/5875). This was followed by the eighth round held at Geneva on 27 June 1996 (see Geneva UNIS press release SG/96/5).

2. At the two meetings, the Ministers discussed the implementation of the Chairman's statements adopted by consensus at the fifty-first and fifty-second sessions of the Commission on Human Rights, the importance of which was recognized. At the seventh round, the Ministers welcomed the visit of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Jose Ayala-Lasso, to Jakarta and East Timor in December 1995, during which he held extensive discussions with officials of the Government of Indonesia about the human rights situation in East Timor.

3. The two Foreign Ministers held in-depth discussions on the substantive issues that had been identified previously related to an eventual framework for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor. Without prejudice to their respective positions of principle, the two sides have continued to engage in serious, constructive - albeit difficult - discussions. These efforts are still continuing and will no doubt need patience and perseverance in order to bear fruit.

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* A/51/150.

4. The ninth round of talks will take place in New York on 21 December 1996. In the meantime, my Special Adviser, Mr. Ismat Kittani, will lead discussions in New York between the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations of the two Governments. As part of these efforts I have continued to consult with East Timorese personalities of various political persuasions.

5. Continuing the useful exercise that began in 1995, I facilitated a second meeting of the All-Inclusive Intra-East Timorese Dialogue, held at Burg Schlaining, Austria, from 19 to 22 March 1996. The Dialogue, which is an effort aimed at enabling the East Timorese to contribute to the creation of an atmosphere conducive to the achievement of a solution to the question of East Timor, was held under the terms agreed upon by the Ministers at the fifth round of talks on 9 January 1995. A representative of the United Nations attended the meeting without taking part in the discussions. The participants, representing a cross-section of East Timorese political opinion and taking part in their individual capacities, adopted the "Burg Schlaining Declaration - 1996" in which they expressed, inter alia, their interest and readiness in continuing the Dialogue. They also conveyed to the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal a proposal for the establishment of an East Timorese cultural centre at Dili, and declared that they would welcome Portuguese assistance to help East Timor's human resources development through such concrete measures as the provision of financial and technical support for East Timor University and practical training of youth in all areas of relevance to the needs of the East Timorese people. The Declaration also reaffirmed the need to implement the necessary measures in the field of human rights in various areas, including the protection of women, with a view to promoting peace, stability, justice and social harmony.

6. At the eighth round of talks in June, the two Ministers considered the proposals of the All-Inclusive Intra-East Timorese Dialogue and agreed to proceed with further consultations on the proposals relating to the establishment of an East Timorese cultural centre and to the development of human resources in East Timor. They also took note positively of my intention to facilitate and offer the necessary arrangements for another meeting of the Dialogue. I am at present consulting with the parties about the time and venue of the meeting. I am encouraged by the positive and constructive approach of the participants of the Dialogue and by their readiness to contribute further to the search for a solution.

7. Given the continued desire of the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal to find a negotiated settlement of the problem, I am confident that the talks being held under my auspices will lead to the achievement of a workable long-term solution. The task at hand is not easy, and I will rely on the continued cooperation of the parties and on their readiness to show greater flexibility for the progress and ultimate success of this exercise.